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A SERMON

ON

THE DOCTRINE OF

SACRAMENTAL CONFESSION,

PREACHED IN St. PATRICK'S CHAPEL, TOXTETH PARK,

BY THE

REV. ALEXANDER JAMES McCARRON,

(OF LONDONDERRY,)

TO ASSIST IN SUPPORTING THE SCHOOLS ATTACHED TO THE CHAPEL,

WHICH PROVIDE

SIX HUNDRED POOR CHILDREN

WITH THE MEANS OF RELIGIOUS AND MORAL EDUCATION.

LIVERPOOL, SEPTEMBER 29th, 1839.

"He who causeth a Sinner to be converted from the error of his way, shall save his soul from death, and cover a multitude of sins."—*St. James*, v. 20.

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SERMON.

"AS THE FATHER HATH SENT ME, I ALSO SEND YOU. WHEN HE HAD SAID THIS HE BREATHED ON THEM; AND HE SAID TO THEM, RECEIVE YE THE HOLY GHOST: WHOSE SINS YOU SHALL FORGIVE, THEY ARE FORGIVEN THEM; AND WHOSE SINS YOU SHALL RETAIN, THEY ARE RETAINED."—John xx. 21, *et seq.*

These are the memorable words used by our Divine Redeemer, in the institution of the holy Sacrament of Penance. By these words was conferred on the Apostles, and through them, on the Priests of the Catholic Church, a power never before conferred on men, and in which even the angels of God have not been permitted to participate.

Penance may be regarded as a virtue and as a sacrament. As a virtue, implying a sincere sorrow for having offended God, and detestation of crime, united to the firm purpose of its future abandonment, penance was at all times deemed essential. In this sense the Council of Trent applies the words, "Unless you do penance you shall all likewise perish." In the same sense, Peter, the prince of the Apostles, in his first sermon, by which three thousand were gained to the Church of Christ, commands, previously to the reception of baptism, the necessity of penance. "When they had heard these things they had compunction in their hearts, they said to Peter, and to the rest of the Apostles, what shall we do then brethren. But Peter said to them, do penance and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of your sins." Acts ii. 37, 38. The awful denunciations of the Almighty's vengeance against sinners, recorded in the Sacred Volume, are to be understood as directed against impenitent sinners alone, whilst mercy and forgiveness are promised only to the penitent. Thus the Almighty, speaking through the prophet Ezechias, says, "Be converted and do penance for all your iniquities, and impurity shall not be your ruin." Ezec. xviii. Penance, as a virtue, united to faith and hope in the Messias to come, previously to the bloody sacrifice on Calvary's Mount, sufficed to reconcile sinners to their offended God. Since his coming, those who have transgressed after baptism must have recourse to penance as a sacrament. Perfect contrition, (to which the

Almighty has at all times annexed the remission of crime,) implies, if possible, the approach, or so soon as possible, the desire of approaching this sacrament. The sacrament of penance is the ordinary channel by which, to those fallen after baptism, the grace of remission flowing from the death of Christ is communicated, and for this very purpose has this sacrament been instituted.

To prove penance a sacrament is a task of little difficulty. A sacrament, by the united agreement of Christians of all religions, is defined an external or sensible rite, divinely instituted, and conferring grace. The confession of the penitent, and absolution of the minister, is not denied to be an external or sensible rite; that it has been divinely instituted is manifest from the promise of Christ:—"Amen I say to you, whatsoever you shall bind upon earth shall be bound also in heaven, and whatsoever you shall loose upon earth shall be loosed also in heaven." Matt. xviii. 18. Its divine institution may be also, and still more clearly proved, from the words I have selected for my text. "As the Father hath sent me I also send you, and when he had said this he breathed on them, and he said to them, receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain they are retained." The grace conferred is that justifying grace by which sins are remitted. That Christ by these words conferred on his ministers the power of remitting sins, it will be my duty to establish.

That penance is a sacrament, and that in this sacrament the validly ordained and duly commissioned priests of the Church of God have received from Christ the power of remitting sins committed after baptism, although formerly acknowledged, has been, in latter times, much controverted, and is now obstinately denied by many Protestants. It was, to the first reformers, in their new arrangement of the sacraments, a subject of considerable hesitation whether to admit or reject penance from the number. In the commencement of his book on the Babylonish Captivity, at the conclusion of which, he, for the first time, denied to it the dignity of a Sacrament, Luther ranks Penance with Baptism and the Eucharist. Melancthon, in the first edition of the "Locorum Omnium," edited 1522, excludes penance from the sacraments, and twenty-one years after, in his

second edition, published 1543, on mature deliberation corrects his error, and restores it to its place among the evangelical sacraments.

In every sacrament, there is what is called by theologians, matter and form. The form, in penance, is the absolution of the priest: the matter,—the acts of the penitent; contrition, confession, and satisfaction. Hence the sacrament of penance is frequently termed the sacrament of confession. The mysteries of the Confessional and all its pretended horrors, furnish to the calumniators of religion at the present day, the most fruitful source of obloquy and invective. Its degrading influence, its immorality, its tyranny, have been lately the untiring theme of every sacrilegious trader on the ignorance and prejudice of the British public.

Christians, it is my duty not to excite, but to repress the sentiments of indignation, which these malevolent and unholy insults to your religious feelings are calculated, perhaps intended, to arouse. You, who are accustomed to approach with humble piety the sacred tribunal; who have been instructed, that without sorrow for sin, love of God, determination of amendment, and satisfaction to the utmost extent of your ability and means, you can reap from confession no advantage; you, who have experienced its salutary influence in repressing evil inclinations, and its holy and powerful aid in the acquisition of virtue; who, humbly acknowledging your guilt, and receiving absolution,—your hearts moved by grace, and relying on the unfailing promise of your affectionate Redeemer, have felt assured of forgiveness and mercy; you, beloved Christians, could bear grateful testimony, that what they call tyranny, is the most effectual balm, bearing consolation and peace to the disturbed mind and the troubled conscience; that what these revilers term degrading and immoral, elevates the soul and purifies the spirit; and, mourning over the infatuation of mind, and perversity of intellect, which prompt these unholy revilings,—sorrowing that the religion of Christ should be so grossly misrepresented, and this mystery of the mercy of God so sacrilegiously mocked and ungenerously spurned, can pray for these enemies of your faith in the meek language of your dying Master: "Oh! Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Is it not passing strange, that Christian men should treat with

rancorous vituperation a holy institution, which even infidels have respected? Voltaire himself bears testimony to its usefulness. In the tragedy of Olympia he says, "There is not, perhaps, a wiser institution. Most men, when they have fallen into great crimes, naturally feel remorse. The law-makers who established mysteries and expiations were equally studious to prevent the guilty from yielding to despair and relapsing into their crimes." And in the Annals of the Empire, vol. i. page 41, "The enemies of the Church of Rome who have declaimed against this wholesome institution seem to have deprived the world of the best check that could be given to vice. The sages of antiquity were themselves sensible of its importance. If they could not impose it on man as an obligation, they established the practice for those who aspired to a life of greater purity; it was the first expiation of the initiated among the Egyptians, and in the mysteries of the Eleusinian Ceres. Thus has the Christian religion sanctified a practice of which God permitted that human wisdom should discover the utility and embrace the shadow." The author of the Philosophical and Political History of the Commerce of the Indies could not refuse his encomiums to confession. "The Jesuits have established a Theocratical government in Paraguay, but with a peculiar advantage to the religion on which it is built. This is the practice of confession, a practice of immense benefit as long as its ministers will not make a bad use of it. This alone stands in lieu of penal laws, and watches over the purity of morals. In Paraguay, religion, more powerful than the force of arms, leads the culprit to the feet of the magistrate. There it is, that far from palliating his crimes, religion prompts him to aggravate them; instead of eluding the punishment, he comes to beg it on his knees. The more severe and public it is, the more it pacifies and composes the conscience of the criminal. Thus the punishment which every where else frightens the guilty, is here a comfort to them, as it smooths remorse by expiation. The people of Paraguay have no civil laws, being unacquainted with property; nor have they any criminal laws, because each individual accuses himself, and inflicts on himself voluntary punishment. All their laws are precepts of religion. The best of all governments would be a Theocracy, in which the tribunal of confession were established, if always directed by virtuous men, and upon rational principles."

The very apostles of the reformation, practically acquainted with this Sacrament, acknowledged its efficacy, and admitted its advantages. Melancthon (in the 11th article, Acts of Ratisbon) declares, "As for absolution, there is no doubt about it; for it is evident that we retain it in our churches, and approve and defend it." Hear the testimony of Luther himself, in his book on the Babylonish captivity,—"Private confession pleases me wonderfully: it is useful, it is even necessary. I rejoice that it is practised in the church of Christ; for it is the only remedy for an afflicted conscience." And in the collection of his German writings (vol. 2, p. 272), so strongly convinced was he of its holy advantages, he would not permit it to be abolished:—"Sooner would I return to the Papal tyranny, than let confession be abolished." Many Protestants of more modern times admitted the doctrine of confession:—"It is confessed, that all priests, and none but priests, have power to forgive sins; that private confession to a priest is a very ancient practice in the church." (Bishop Montague's "Gagger Gagged.") "Our confession must be *integra et perfecta*, not by halves. All our sins must be confessed; *omnia*, VENIALIA, *et omnia*, MORTALIA.—God alone blots out sin.—True: but there is another confessor that would not be neglected. He who would be sure of pardon, let him find a priest and make his humble confession to him. Heaven waits and expects the priest's sentence here, and what he binds or looses, the Lord confirms in heaven." (Bishop Sparrow's sermon on Confession.)

Rousseau himself, a Protestant and an infidel, could not withhold his admiration of the great advantages resulting from the practice of Confession:—"*What restitutions and reparations does not confession produce among the Catholics!*" Even at the Confession of Augsburg,—that the sentence of its rejection was far from unanimous, may be fairly concluded from the express instructions given to the minister who shall have heard the penitent's confession, to absolve him in these words: "I, from the command of Christ, remit to you your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." (History of the Variations, Book 3, No. 46, Bossuet.) None of the reformed churches, if we derive its faith from its books of prayer and established canons, appears to have more steadfastly adhered to the doctrine of Sacramental Confession than the Church of England.

In the book of Common Prayer, authorized by the Church of England, we find special confession recommended to the sick person;—nay more—the form of absolution which the minister is enjoined to use, will, to those who consult our ritual, be found little more than the translation of the very absolution used in the Catholic Church in the administration of the sacrament:—"*Dominus noster Jesus Christus te absolvat,*" &c. The words used by the Protestant minister are as follows:—"Our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath left power to his Church to absolve sinners who truly repent and believe in him, of his great mercy forgives thee thine offences, and, by his authority committed to me, *I absolve thee from all thy sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.*"—(Book of Common Prayer: Visitation of the Sick.)

Now, what are these words, but the strict translation of the identical terms used by the Priests of the Catholic Church, as prescribed by their ritual;—"*Et ego, auctoritate ipsius, absolvo te ab omnibus peccatis tuis, in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.*"

If private confession be really chargeable with all that monstrous tendency to human depravity and debasement, why is it recommended to the sick person, at the close of life, and as a preparation for eternity? If the prerogative of pardoning sins belong so peculiarly to God, that it never has been committed to mortals, why do the ministers of the Church of England fatally deceive their hearers, even at the awful approach of death, by proclaiming that they absolve them from all their sins by the authority of Jesus committed to them? On the other hand, if it be salutary and even necessary at the close of existence,—can it be disadvantageous and useless to the living?

It may perhaps be asserted, that in the book of Common-prayer no mention is made of *private* confession: the Protestant Council held in London under James I. must be admitted decisive. In the 113th Canon it is said, "If any one confess his secret sins privately to a minister, for the disburthening of his conscience, and that he may get spiritual relief, we strictly forbid him to make known to any person any sin or crime so entrusted to his honour and mercy." That the secret sin is confessed in order to obtain absolution, and that the right to confer it is claimed by the power of the keys committed to them as the lawful successors of the

Apostles,—interpreting in their own favour these words of Christ, "To you I will give the keys of the kingdom of Heaven," &c.—is manifest from the 19th canon of the Protestant Council held in Dublin, under Charles I. (A.D. 1634).

In this canon, which will be found attached to the Book of Homilies, it is thus prescribed:—"Whereas every lay person is bound to receive the holy communion thrice every year, and many notwithstanding do not receive that sacrament once in the year, we do require every minister to give warning to his parishioners publicly in the Church at morning prayer, the Sunday before every time of the administering the holy sacrament, for the better preparation of themselves; which said warning we do enjoin said parishioners to accept and obey, under the penalty and danger of the law; and the minister of every parish, and in Cathedral and collegiate Churches, some principal minister of the Church, shall, the afternoon before the said administration, give warning by the tolling of the bell or otherwise, to the intent that if any one have scruple of conscience, or desire the special ministry of reconciliation, he may afford it to those who need it. And to this end the people are often to be exhorted to enter into a special examination of the state of their own souls, and that finding themselves either extreme dull, or much troubled in mind, they do resort unto God's ministers, to receive from them, as well advice and counsel, for the quickening of their dead hearts, and the subduing of those corruptions whereunto they have been subject, *as the benefit of absolution likewise, for the quieting of their consciences by the power of the keys committed to his ministers for that purpose.*" I do not pretend to understand—who does?—all the peculiar tenets of the Protestant religion. Many Protestants, I am convinced, have never been aware that the power of absolving from sin, designated by the keys entrusted to the Apostles, when Christ said, "To you I will give the keys of the kingdom of Heaven," &c., and claimed by the priests of the Catholic church, as their legitimate successors,—a claim which has excited so much pious horror, and become the eloquent subject of so much abuse and obloquy,—that this power has been also claimed—nay more, (if their books of prayer are to be received in evidence—if the very canons of their church are to be deemed sufficient authority,) is still claimed by the ministers of the established religion in

this country. But, whilst—for the very purposes prescribed by the canons—our confessionals are crowded by Catholics desirous of "the ministry of reconciliation, who resort unto God's ministers, to receive from them, as well advice and counsel for the quickening their dead hearts, and the subduing of those corruption whereunto they have been subject, as the benefit of absolution likewise, for the quieting of their consciences by the power of the keys committed to his ministers for that purpose,"—whilst Catholics, at present, as in former ages, resort to their priests, and confess, with frank and fearless confidence, their soul's inquietudes before them,—and whilst the duties thus imposed form the most arduous portion of the zealous labours enjoined by the sacred ministry of the Catholic clergyman; the undreaded terrors of the law have long since ceased to compel their hearers to confide their secret sins to "the honour and mercy" of Protestant ministers: the morning service, on the Sunday preceding communion, passes over, and the Protestant stations of Confession, on the Saturday following, cease to be announced. The tolling of the evening bell is now no longer heard, summoning "the extreme dull and much troubled in mind" to breathe their pious "*scruples, if they have any*" into the ear of the Protestant minister,—that they may obtain "the benefit of absolution likewise, for the quieting of their consciences, by the power of the keys which Christ has committed to his ministers for that purpose." If their Church has given too favourable a colouring to this much misrepresented doctrine,—if Protestant ministers will persevere in maintaining the practice of confession to be immoral and debasing,—if they are conscientiously of opinion that there is attributable to confession one thousandth part of the enormity with which they reproach it;—since their religion, far from disavowing, respectfully retains this holy institution, in which their ministers no longer believe, and which their members have ceased to practise,—in consistency—in decency—as virtuous and faithful men,—why do they not renounce the Church by law established? And (as the innovators of the sixteenth century), applying, to her, the epithet Babylon, and raising the war-cry of old,—why do they not shout, (in the language of the arch reformer they pretend to reverence,) "Come out of that city Babylon, that you may not be partakers of her sins and of her plagues," until she is com-

pletely purified from this foul corruption, this worst stain of Popish abominations? Why do not these Christian ministers lift up their voices in testimony? Why, oh! "Why, are the watchmen on the gates silent?" Why do they not at least convoke some other great Protestant Council, which, laying claim to a more recent, and therefore more accredited inspiration of the Holy Spirit, may remodel their Book of Common Prayer, and explode these heterodox canons, which savour so strongly of Popish and antiquated doctrines? Until some new change be effected, if they have ceased to believe in, they should, in prudence at least, speak with reverence of, a holy institution, which has extorted from infidels respect,—to which even Luther and Melancthon have not refused their praise, nor blushed to avow their attachment.

Previously to the era of the Protestant Reformation, through the long space of fifteen centuries, there will be found none to agree with those, who, in later times, have excluded penance from the number of sacraments, and denied, to the absolution of the minister, the remission of sins. Like those *novi homines* who feel disgraced by the dishonour of their parents, sensitive of the disregard in which the world holds those of recent origin, they refuse to acknowledge their reputed parents, and claim, if not more honourable, more obscure and ancient progenitors. Penetrating into the times which they themselves denominate the dark centuries, they recognize in the Albigenses, Waldenses, or poor men of Lyons, a family connexion: and now, John Huss, and now his predecessor Wickliffe, are hailed as the founders of their religion, the apostles of their creed. I will not stop to analyze the crimes by which the memory of these infatuated men are loaded by the writers of their age: on the subject of penance they had with the reformers of the present day little agreement in doctrine. They acknowledged penance to be a sacrament; and, whilst they denied efficacy to the absolution of a bad priest, they recognized in a good laic the power of remitting sins. In no preceding age, with the exception of the Montanists and Novatians, was any error regarding penance attempted to be introduced into the Church. These heretics held it to be a sacrament, and admitted that priests, in the exercise of the commission they derived from Christ, had generally power to absolve from sin, but main-

tained that some crimes were so horrible in their nature, so monstrous in their guilt, that in their regard the ministry of reconciliation must be unavailing.

Had the Protestants succeeded in uniting themselves to the Oriental Church,—many amiable portraits of the simplicity of morals—many romantic pencillings of the favoured retreats, in the vallies of Piedmont,—of the persecuted confessors of their faith, would have been lost to the literary world; the Albigenses and Waldenses would have been carelessly surrendered to the contempt and execration of their contemporaries. John Huss, and even Wickliffe, those doughty champions of private judgment,—that hitherto unheard of principle, originating the foul rebellion to the Church of God, which in the sixteenth century burst on the astonished world in the fulness and freshness of its infamy,—would have found but few panegyrists, nor would they have been the subjects of so much undeserved and unmeaning eulogium.

The first reformers, withdrawing from the Catholic Church, which, until they recanted their novel opinions, and renounced their disobedience to the sovereign Pontiff, could not receive them again into her bosom, vainly sought among the schismatical churches of the East one with which they would be permitted to hold communion. Cut off from the Church in connection with the See of Peter, the chain of apostolical succession thus broken, it was to them of the utmost moment to link themselves, if possible, to some other Church, the apostolicity of whose origin could not be denied or questioned. They intrigued with members of the Greek Church, but although individuals were found faithless and corrupt enough to adopt their new error regarding the sacraments, and would have swelled their numbers by admitting the new applicants within her pale, the very attempt was fatal to the hopes of the reformers. The Councils of the Greek Church, instantly convoked, condemned their errors, and united in proclaiming with the Latin Church, that the doctrine of Seven Sacraments, penance among the number, was the faith of the universal Church, and was of divine origin. The rituals, books of prayer, &c. of the Oriental Churches, demonstrate even to the present day, their conformity in faith and practice with the Catholic Church, from which many of them have long since unhappily separated. When we take into account the

rivalry which for many centuries existed between the Greek and Latin Churches, the conclusion is irresistible, that the doctrines in which they both continue to agree can be derived from no later source than the preaching of the Apostles, by whom both Eastern and Western Churches were originally established. That the haughty rival of the Latin Church would, since the schism, receive from her any new doctrine, will not be supposed: that the Latin would adopt from the Greek Church any new doctrine, since the period in which she unfurled the oriflamme of defiance and rebellion, is still more incredible. The schism took place under Michael Cerularius, patriarch of Constantinople, in the eleventh century; but the jealousies which led to that unhappy result were of a much earlier epoch. Under Photius, in the ninth century, the Patriarchs contended for immunities and privileges which the sovereign Pontiffs uniformly opposed. Even in the fourth century, in consequence of the ordination of Paulinus to the see of Antioch, of which Miletus was in possession, the suppressed jealousies burst into a flame, which, heightened by pride and obstinacy, and consuming the bonds of divine peace and christian charity which had hitherto linked these Apostolic Churches in holy harmony together, threatened their separation from each other. The flame, although suppressed, was never effectually extinguished, and the introduction by either, of any new doctrine which the Apostles had not handed down, would have fanned into fearful conflagration the smothered, but still living, embers of dissension and of strife. The present Catholic faith regarding penance must have therefore been, prior to the fourth century, the common belief of the Greek and Latin Churches.

That it was introduced prior to the fourth century, at which time it must have been the established doctrine of all the Western and Oriental Churches, is improbable—impossible. Are we to suppose the streams of divine faith corrupted even at their source? At so early a date, when many lived who imbibed their doctrines from those who received them from the Apostles themselves! Could all the churches have been so soon corrupted, and a material change in doctrine been silently, and without remonstrance, effected? The four first are denominated by Protestants *the golden centuries of the Church.* Did she even then err in doctrine? Did God, even in those pure ages,

withdraw his protection? Had he not, so long, at least, drawn around her the circle of infallibility, within whose sacred area error was unknown, and heresy dared not enter?

The very nature of the Sacrament of Penance, enjoining a practice repugnant to our feelings of pride and self-esteem, forbids us to harbour a supposition so injurious to truth, so discreditable to the religion of Christ. The power of the minister, by which he is commissioned to bind as well as loose, to retain as well as remit sins, supposes for the proper discharge of a trust so important, a full knowledge of their extent and nature, otherwise he cannot obviously exercise that trust with judgment and discretion. It belongs not to man to investigate the secret recesses of another's heart. This knowledge, necessary to its useful discharge, can be furnished only by the sinner himself. When, therefore, the power of remitting and retaining sin was confided to the minister, the obligation of confession on the part of the penitent, without which the exercise of the power would be inoperative or destructive, must have been of necessity enjoined. To protect the character of the sinner, and induce him to disclose his crimes with confidence and candour, the confession enjoined must be private and confidential. The obligation of confessing to another our most hidden sins is painfully humiliating. No motive less than the love of God, or to save our souls from the eternal terrors of hell, could command our compliance. It is an universal obligation: as none are exempt from sin, none are freed from the duty of confession. If it be tyranny, as its opponents term it, it is a tyranny to which king and subject, peer and peasant, pontiff and priest, are alike subservient. Many Protestant ministers of piety and learning have extolled the advantages of confession, and deplored its disuse, yet their efforts to continue this holy practice have been unavailing. The absolution recorded in the Book of Common Prayer is never resorted to. The canons are neglected. The penalty of the law, if unrepealed, is never acted on. What Protestant in these times ever practises confession? What Protestant ever thinks of confiding his secret crimes to "the honour and mercy" of his minister? Could the threats of the law, could any authority less than that of God re-establish among Protestants the practice of confession, as it universally exists among Catholics? How was it then originally established in the

Catholic Church? How did it become so prevalent, so universal? The only reasonable answer is, that it was instituted by Jesus Christ himself: it cannot be otherwise accounted for; to no inferior authority would the Universal Church have yielded obedience.

To collect the different testimonies scattered through the writings of the early Fathers, which establish, as relates to the Sacrament of Penance, the faith and practice of the ancient Church in unison with ours, would be a work of time and toil. In the few extracts I am about to make there will be, to any unprejudiced and reasoning mind, sufficient evidence that on this subject the present faith of the Catholic Church has been that of all preceding ages.

"It was not given to the Jewish priests to cleanse the leprosy of the body; but only to pronounce it cleansed: but the Priests of the new Law have received the power—not regarding the leprosy of the body, but the uncleanness of the soul,—not of pronouncing it cleansed—but of absolutely cleansing."—*St. Chrysostom, book* ii. *On Penance, cap.* 6.

The same eminent and eloquent Saint, in another portion of his writings, compares the dignity of the priesthood to that of the angels; and, viewed as regards the administration of baptism, and, especially, the pardoning of sins, he ranks Priests above the angels, on whom this glorious privilege has never been conferred.

"A power, never granted to the angels, has been given by God to the Priests; who not only regenerate, but even afterwards have the power of pardoning sins."—*St. Chrysostom, book* iii. *On the Priesthood.*

"If you think the gate of Heaven still shut, remember that the Lord hath left its keys to Peter, and through him he hath left them to the Church."—*Tertullian. Scorpiaci, cap.* x. *p.* 830.

How strikingly beautiful the argument of St. Ambrose, in refutation of those who admit the efficacy of Baptism, and yet deny to the Sacrament of Penance the remission of sins, on the ground assumed by the present opponents of the doctrine,—that offences against God cannot be remitted through the agency of man. Citing the words of Christ to his disciples,—"*Whose sins you remit, they are remitted unto them*"; he proceeds thus:—

"If it be not allowed that sins would be remitted through man, why do you baptise? for, in Baptism, there is the remission of all sins: nor is it of consequence whether that remission is effected by penance, or by the baptismal font. Priests claim the privilege which has been conferred on them. In both, the Ministry is the same. Is it not the name of God produces the effect?—*St. Ambrose, Book on Penance, cap.* 2 *&* 8.

"Shew me bitter tears, that I may mingle mine with yours. Impart your troubles to the Priest, as to your Father; he will be touched with a sense of your misery. Shew to him what is concealed, without blushing. Open the secrets of your souls, as if you were shewing to a physician a hidden disorder; he will take care of your honour and your cure."—*St. Gregory of Nyssa, Sermo de Pen. p.* 176.

"The sinner does not blush to declare to the Priest of the Lord his sin, and to ask medicine."—*Origen. Second Homily on the Levite.*

"If we discover our sins, not only to God, but to those who may thus apply a remedy to our wounds and iniquities, our sins will be effaced by him who said, "I have blotted out thy iniquities as a cloud, and thy sins as a mist" (Isaias, xliv. 22).—*Origen. Homily on Luke.*

"Your conscience had gathered corruption, the impostume had swelled, it tortured you—acknowledge the hand of the physician. *Confess,*—in confession the corrupted matter will flow out and depart."
—*St. Augustin. On Psalm* 66.

There is still extant a formulary of examination, preparatory to confession, attributed to Egbert, Archbishop of York in the eighth century, which Morinus quotes; and one of still higher authority, attributed to St. Fulgentius. In the enumeration of sins with which the penitent, if guilty, should charge himself in confession, we read the following:

"I have unworthily received, without *confession* and *penance*, the body and blood of the Lord."

When Protestant divines are adduced as witnesses in favour of Catholic doctrines, their testimony, as being suspected papists, is at once repudiated. Even the Holy Fathers have long since ceased to be regarded, by members of the reformed religions, as authority. The attempt to make them speak the language of Protestantism is an admitted failure. "If that be the truth, which the holy Fathers have, *uno ore*, unanimously professed, it must be owned that it is entirely on the side of Popery." (Dudith to Beza, 1st. epist.) The indiscreet zeal which prompted Jewel, Dr. Bull, and others, to make the attempt, ending in discomfiture, is a subject among Protestants of reprehension rather than praise. From the extracts I have made, it may be easily perceived that these holy Fathers held (regarding the sacrament of Penance, and the power of Priests to remit sins) the present faith of the Catholic Church. Even comment is unnecessary.

That the doctrines first taught in the Churches founded by the Apostles themselves, were those delivered by Jesus, no Christian doubts. Passing over the sacred and venerable testimony of the Sainted Fathers of the Ancient Church, the lights

and ornaments of the ages in which they lived,—let us mount to the infancy of Christianity, and examine the records of some nation into which the religion of Jesus had been introduced by one of the disciples of our Lord. I select Spain, being the nation to which Englishmen are least partial. Let controversialists and theologians be silent; and let Mr. Dunham (a Protestant historian, who never omits an opportunity of sneering at Catholicity,) record the early tenets of that religion, introduced into Spain by one of the Apostles of Christ. That he admits that the uninterrupted voice of eighteen centuries has named St. James the Elder, as the first herald of the Gospel, is clear, from the following passage:—

"If Tradition, as an authority, had not long ceased to be recognised on this side the Pyrenees, the historian would have little difficulty in fixing the period of the introduction of the Christian faith into Spain. During eighteen centuries, its uninterrupted voice has named St. James the Elder as the first herald of the Gospel to the idolatrous people of that country." (p. 76.)

He however says that, with greater appearance of reason, it is believed that—

"St. Paul, in person, continued the work of his martyred fellow-disciple, and sowed the seeds of the new Doctrine in Catalonia, Arragon, Valencia, and, above all, in Andalusia. But, whether these Apostles or their successors propagated the Gospel in the Peninsula, certain it is that Spain can adduce her martyrs as early as the second century—perhaps even the first." (p. 77.)

As an historian, he describes the nature of the doctrine thus introduced into Spain.—

"To certain offenders—so strict was the ancient discipline—the Eucharist was denied, even at the point of death: for these, no repentance—no duration of penance—was thought sufficient to cleanse them from impurity, and to make them worthy of partaking in this holiest of privileges."

He narrates who these offenders were; and concludes by observing:—

"But, if this Sacrament was denied them, *Absolution was not; and the penitent did not, therefore, depart without hope of reconciliation with Heaven.*" (p. 89.)—*Dunham's History of Spain:* Lardner edition.

Let us keep in mind the arguments I have already advanced. The most obdurate infidels have admitted the necessity of confession, extolled its advantages, reverenced its holiness, and speak of it in terms of respectful veneration. The most enlightened and virtuous Protestants have borne testimony in its

favour. Melancthon, one of the arch-reformers, defended it; whilst Luther himself, highly approving of this pious and holy practice, declared his determination of abjuring the reformed religion, rather than sanction its abolition. The Confession of Augsburg retained it, and even prescribed a formula of absolution, in which (by the command of Christ) the ministers claim to themselves the power of remitting sins in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. The Church of England preserves to the present day, in her Book of Common-Prayer, the words of absolution to be pronounced by the minister over the sick, after they shall have made a special confession of their sins,—an absolution differing little from that used by the priests of the Catholic Church, in which, by the authority of Jesus committed to them, they absolve the penitent in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen. The Protestant Council held in London under James I. (113th canon), commands secrecy on the part of the minister: and the Protestant Council held in Dublin under Charles I. 1634, in the 19th canon, requires, previously to receiving the holy communion, that the people shall be summoned to confession by the tolling of the bell, which they are to attend under threat of legal penalty; and that the minister shall absolve the penitent, by power of the keys committed to him by Christ for that purpose. The rituals and prayer-books of the Oriental Churches, to the present day, prove that they believe in the sacrament of Penance, and practise confession. The Greek Church declared (at the period of the Reformation) her agreement with the Latin Church regarding Penance,—an agreement which, from the continued rivalry of these churches, could not exist, if the present Catholic faith had not been that of all Christian churches, Oriental and Western, previously to the fourth century. The formulary of examination, preparatory to confession, in the eighth century, and the Sacramentary of St. Gregory, (still higher authority,) in the seventh century, yet extant, are positive proof regarding the practice of those ages. The writings of the holy Fathers in preceding centuries, their lofty notions of sacerdotal dignity, and their own direct testimony, evidence that confession was practised, and that the power of priests to remit sins was the faith of the ancient Church during those ages which produced her most eloquent defenders and most eminent

saints: whilst the Protestant historian, Mr. Dunham, records among the earliest tenets of the Spanish Church, established by one of the disciples of our Lord, the doctrine of Sacramental Confession, and the efficacy of absolution in the remission of sin.

What a blaze of light! What a concatenation of facts!—If all the books of Sacred Scripture were lost, as some of them have been, and all its oracles were silent, how obstinately perverse the heart, how besotted the intellect, how enslaved by bigotry and prejudice must the mind of that man be, who could resist evidence so dazzling, arguments so irresistibly convincing, and still persevere in refusing to acknowledge the Sacrament of Penance, and the power of priests to remit sins, to be the faith of the Church in all ages,—to be doctrines revealed by Jesus Christ, and preached to the world by his apostles. Dynasties have changed,—monuments of ancient grandeur have been defaced,—empires have fallen,—cities of imperishable fame have mouldered, their very ruins are no longer seen, and their site has become a problem: the Prophet of Mecca has swept in desolation over the East, converting churches into mosques, and exchanging the cross for the crescent: savage hordes,—Saxon, and Dane, Goth, and Visigoth, Hun, and Vandal, have deluged in successive inundations all the kingdoms of the West, overwhelming, in their barbarous warfare, arts, and science, and literature,—almost all the monuments of civilization, and almost all the records of polished and cultivated life. The nations they over-ran, received new masters, new laws, new customs, new languages. Every thing was changed, but the religion of Jesus. "One jot or one tittle" did "not pass from the law." Secure in the promise of the Redeemer, "Lo, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world," she had nothing to fear. The storm of devastation swept around the base of the rock on which the Church reposed, yet she tottered not: in peace and persecution her aspect changed not—her voice, her doctrine, her language, in all ages, in all climes, in all vicissitudes, has been ever the same—calm and firm, constant, fearless, and unvarying.

To facts so undoubted, authorities so high, reasoning so manifest, how do the opponents of this doctrine reply? All this, they say, is but human testimony. Can it be proved from Scripture? The Sacred Scripture is the only authority to

which Protestants submit. "To the law and to the testimony." To the law, then, and to the testimony:—I join them in the appeal. "Search the Scriptures:"—Their evidence in favour of this calumniated doctrine is clear and convincing.

Our divine Redeemer promises, first to St. Peter, afterwards to the other disciples, the keys of the kingdom of Heaven. "To you I will give the keys of the kingdom of Heaven; whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound also in Heaven, and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed also in Heaven." (Mat. xvi. 19.) "Amen, Amen, I say unto you, whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound also in Heaven, and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed also in Heaven." (Mat. xviii. 18.) To these texts Protestant ministers refer as the foundation of ecclesiastical authority; to these texts they appeal in vindication of their right to pronounce absolution. Some of them, however, contend that this absolution does not remit sins, but merely declares remitted those sins which God has already pardoned.

This interpretation of Protestants is at variance with the texts themselves, and is opposed, as we have already seen, to all antiquity. These texts were the charter, the commission, the credentials of the Apostles' authority to all people over whom they had received from Christ jurisdiction. The natural and obvious meaning of the words must therefore be the true one, otherwise they would mislead;—nay, more—the very assertion is most blasphemous—they would appear designed by Christ to mislead the faithful. Christ handed over to them the keys of the kingdom of Heaven: wherefore did he do so, but to open and to close its gates? When a master hands over to a servant his keys, the plain and obvious meaning of the act is, that he empowers him to open and to close the place, with the keys of which he is entrusted. Thus, the keys of Heaven were given to the Apostles, that they might open its gates to sinners. Heaven's gates are unlocked, and Heaven is opened, by the pardon of sin. When, therefore, Christ, giving them the keys, said, "Whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed also in Heaven," he meant, what he said,—not that the Apostles would merely declare persons loosed from sin, but that themselves would loose them;—not that they would declare sinners absolved, but that themselves would absolve from sin, and that the God of Heaven would

ratify the sentence. Hence the priests of the new law were declared by St. Chrysostom to rank above the Jewish Priests of old, as "having received the power, not regarding the leprosy of the body, but the uncleanness of the soul,—not of pronouncing cleansed; but of actually cleansing." If the ministers of the Church had merely the power of declaring those forgiven, whom God had already pardoned, the offences of the sinner must be first loosed in Heaven, before the ministers could declare them loosed on earth; whilst the Saviour, by putting the absolution in Heaven in the future tense, teaches that sins are first absolved by the minister on earth, God afterwards ratifying the sentence in Heaven. Hence the rapturous exclamation of St. Hilary, "Oh! blessed door-keeper, whose earthly judgment becomes prejudged authority in Heaven; that what is bound, or loosed, on earth, obtains a like decree in Heaven."

"Whatsoever you shall loose on earth, shall be loosed also in Heaven." How can we understand the word "loose" differently, in the same sentence, in the very same breath? And if, as relates to Heaven, by the acknowledgment of all, it means not a declared, but a real absolution from sin, the power to be conferred by this promise on the Apostles was, of pronouncing not merely sinners absolved, but of really absolving them from their sins.

What direct, or even indirect testimony, can Protestants adduce from the Sacred Volume, which contradicts, or even questions, that Christ confided to the Apostles,—and through them to their successors, the Priests of the Catholic Church,—the power of forgiving sins? The only text I have ever heard adduced, which can be construed to bear this meaning, are the words, "Who can forgive sins, but God alone?" I admit, the text is to be found in the sacred Volume,—(Luke, v.) I admit, that it declares the assertion blasphemous that any other than God has the power of pardoning sin; and that in this instance the meaning of the passage is not perverted. But, let me ask these ignorant objectors,—Who said these words? Was it Jesus Christ? *No.* Was it any of the Apostles? *No.* Was it any of the prophets? *No.* Was it any of the patriarchs or blessed saints? *No.* "*Search the Scriptures.*" This will be found the language of the Scribes and Pharisees, objecting against Jesus Christ, and gainsaying his doctrine. "Who is he that blasphemeth: who can forgive sins, but God alone. (Luke, v. 21).

Many Protestants reject the power of forgiving sins, claimed by the priests of the Catholic Church, as blasphemous pretension; and hold that God cannot, consistently with his own greatness, delegate to man a privilege so lofty—a power so peculiar to himself. To this I reply: It is the right of the Sovereigns, alone, of these realms, to remit the penalty of death. But, it is also their right—a right they daily exercise—to communicate, (if such the royal will,) to their servants, the power of remitting that penalty. The communication of that prerogative, far from lessening, exalts, by imparting a more elevated sense of royal dignity—as our conceptions of the Sun's dazzling lustre become, whilst we gaze on the brilliancy of the stars, transcendantly more sublime, from the reflection that these bodies, opaque and darksome, and in themselves incapable of emitting light, are merely irradiated by the borrowed splendours that have emanated from him,—and are but the reflectors of his glory.

The power to forgive offences against the Divine Majesty must undoubtedly emanate from God. That there is any inherent power in man, as man, to remit sins, would indeed be blasphemous. But, is it not impiety equally daring, and is not the assertion as foully blasphemous,—that God cannot, even if he will it, concede to man the power of pardoning sin, in His Name and by His authority? Puny and contemptible mortals! that would stay the arm of Infinite Majesty! that would set limits to the unfathomable ocean of boundless intelligence and power! and, adopting the language in which the Eternal has addressed the waters of the mighty deep, would dare to say:—"Thus far shalt Thou go, and no farther; and here shalt Thou stay thy swelling waves."

In the 5th chapter of St. Luke, from which the objected passage is taken, we find that Christ, not only as the Son of God in virtue of his Divine nature, but also as the *Son of Man,* had received from his Father the power of pardoning sin. In approbation of his faith, the Redeemer said to the man sick of palsy, "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee." The words, in the original Greek, in which language the Revelation was written by St. Luke, are, Ἄνθρωπε, ἀφέωνταί σοι αἱ ἁμαρτίαι σου· (Luke, v. 20.) The Scribes and Pharisees are struck with pious horror.—"Who is this that blasphemeth: who can forgive sins but God alone? The Redeemer appeals to a miracle, to prove that, as the *Son of*

Man, he was possessed of the power his language intimated.—"But, that you may know that the *Son of Man* hath power on earth to forgive sins, he saith to the sick of the palsy, I say to thee arise, take up thy bed, and go into thy house; and immediately, rising up before them, he took up the bed on which he lay, and he went to his own house, glorifying God."

Let us now change the scene; and consider the time, the place, the circumstances, under which Christ conferred on the Apostles, the power designated by the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, promised to St. Peter, (Mat. xvi. 18,) and afterwards to the other disciples, (Mat. xviii. 18). We shall find them recorded in the 20th chapter of St. John.

It was on the day of the Resurrection. The Apostles, fearful and timid, shrunk into secrecy and solitude, remained concealed within closed doors, to protect themselves against the excited fury and hatred of their nation. They affectionately recal to memory the discourses of their master, and ruminate over them; "and they remembered his words." To the miracle of the resurrection, Christ had appealed in testimony of his divinity. "You shall throw down this temple, and in three days I will build it up again." The third day has arrived. Was He God?—or, was he an impostor? Their bosoms are agitated by hope—and fear,—and faith,—and doubt,—and joy,—and anxiety. Mary Magdalen rushes to the house where the Apostles were gathered together through fear of the Jews. Oh, gladdening intelligence! Christ has indeed arisen! She has seen—she has spoken with Jesus. "I have seen the Lord, and these things he said unto me."

On the evening of the same day, Jesus miraculously enters through the closed doors, and "stood in the midst of them, and said, Peace be to you." To convince them of the reality of his resurrection, "he shewed them his hands and his side"; and now proceeds to confer upon them the extraordinary power he had formerly promised, when he said,—"To you I will give the keys of the kingdom of Heaven," &c. "And he said to them again, Peace be to you. As the Father hath sent me, I also send you. When he had said this, he breathed upon them, and he said to them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained." St. John, xx. 21–23. Let us

seriously and attentively weigh all the circumstances communicated to us in these sacred passages.

His miraculous entrance—the evidence he affords them of the reality of his resurrection—his double salutation—the terms in which he announces their mission; that they were sent by him with the same power with which he had been sent by the Father—the unusual ceremony of his breathing on them—his imparting to them the Holy Ghost, previously to the descent of the Holy Spirit on the feast of Pentecost:—does it not appear evident that some high, mysterious, extraordinary power is about to be conferred on the Apostles, never previously conferred on the children of men? In the explanation of Protestants, that forgiveness in this passage means declared forgiveness, the words of Christ, "Whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven," are to be thus paraphrased,—Whose sins you declare forgiven, they are declared forgiven. Does the second part of this sentence, thus paraphrased, refer to God, or to the minister? If to God,—sins which God declares forgiven must be really forgiven; if then the sins which the minister declares forgiven, are really forgiven by God, then do Protestants admit the existence of the power against which they are contending,—that sins are forgiven by God in consequence of the absolution of the minister. But, if, meaning by the word *forgive,* to *declare forgiven,* we refer the word forgiven, in the second part of the sentence, also to the minister, the meaning of the text, according to Protestants, will be—Whose sins you declare forgiven, they are by you declared forgiven:—which would be arrant nonsense—senseless and unmeaning tautology. If the minister were merely empowered to declare sins forgiven; and if his sentence of absolution was not to be followed by forgiveness on the part of God; what is his declaration, but a mere opinion? As forgiveness takes place by the will of the Almighty, attended by a change in the sinner's soul, and as ministers cannot, more than other men, dive into the secrets of another's heart, much less penetrate the concealed mysteries of the Eternal God,—may not a mere layman pronounce, equally with a minister, his opinion regarding the sinner's forgiveness, and may not his declaration be as well and as truly pronounced? Thus, no real power would have been conferred, and the magnificent promises of the Redeemer would be frittered away to a mere non-entity.

In the Greek version of St. John, (the version universally received by all Christians,) the words in which Christ addressed the disciples, in the institution of the Sacrament of Penance, are, Ἄν τινων ἀθῆτε τὰς ἁμαρτίας, ἀθίενται αὐτοῖς· "Whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven." The words, expressed in English by "forgive," "forgiven," are ἀθῆτε, ἀθίενται. Not only is the language similar to that in which Christ addressed the man sick of the palsy, when he said, "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee," but the very word, the very verb, is the same. Now,—as it would be blasphemous, after the instant prodigy performed by the Redeemer, in attestation of its truth, to deny that Christ, as the *Son of Man*, had power on earth to forgive sins; when, by his resurrection, he had proved himself God as well as man; and when, in the most solemn manner, he declared that the Apostles were sent by him, as he was sent by the Father;—"As my Father sent me, I also send you," and after breathing on them, said "Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven;"—is it not doubting,—blasphemously doubting the truth or the efficacy of the words of the Saviour, to deny to the Apostles the power of forgiving sins, which his words so clearly and manifestly declared?

Christ, being sent by the Father, had received from Him, as *man*, the power of really pardoning sin. The Apostles are declared by Christ to be sent by him for the pardon of sin, as he was sent by the Father. Therefore, the Apostles received from Christ, the power of really pardoning sin. Who can withstand this reasoning? who can be insensible to the force of this argument? It can neither be overturned nor evaded. Here, our opponents do not even pretend that there is figurative language. Here, there is no comparison, no metaphor, no concealed allegory. Words cannot be conceived, more clearly expressing the faith of the Catholic Church that her Priests have power to remit sins, than the words of Christ himself. Jesus having declared, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven," who, other than an infidel, disbelieving the divinity of the Lord, will dare to deny the existence of the power, or to question its truth?

The last objection, to which some of our opponents have recourse, is—admitting that the apostles received from Christ the power to forgive sins,—like the other miraculous powers recorded in St. Mark, that power died with them; and this grant

to the Apostles does not sanction the faith of the Catholic Church, that all regularly ordained and duly commissioned priests of the church, have received the power of pardoning sins.

A little reflection will convince us that this is merely a subterfuge,—and that if this power was conferred on the Apostles, it was intended that it should be conferred on, and exercised by, their successors, in all countries and throughout all time.

The extraordinarily high and holy privilege of pardoning sin, is most unjustly compared to those miraculous powers promised by Christ to the first believers. "And these signs shall follow them that believe. In my name they shall cast out devils, they shall speak with new tongues, they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them, they shall lay their hands upon the sick, and they shall recover."—St. Mark, xvi. 17, 18. These powers, necessary to propagate the Gospel among infidels, by proving that the preachers were commissioned by heaven to announce the new doctrines, continued in the church, for the same purpose and under the same circumstances. Witness the prodigies performed by St. Francis Xavier in the presence of thousands; which whole towns, of all religious sects, and entire nations, Christian and Pagan, evidenced: prodigies, unsurpassed in number and splendour even by those of the Apostles themselves. But when a nation has been converted, and the doctrines of Christianity have been received, these miraculous powers are generally withdrawn, that the faith of the people may be exercised. "Blessed are they who have not seen, and have believed." The power of pardoning sins would have no effect on the conversion of Heathens, who could not have any sensible proof of its existence. The personal appearance continues, while the soul becomes renovated: the forgiveness of sins takes place, without the dearest friend, the most intimate associate, being aware of the miraculous change: it is known only to God, to whom all secrets are exposed, and all mysteries manifest. The power to pardon sins, unlike the miraculous powers recorded in St. Mark, could therefore have no effect in the conversion of unbelievers. Had then these powers not been continued in the church, beyond the period of the Apostles, it would be no argument that the power of forgiving sins had ceased. The power of forgiving sins was not conferred on the Apostles to effectuate the conversion of Infidels; to

which it was inadequate:—nor was it for the mere purpose of honouring the Apostles. The chief object of the Redeemer was, and must have been, (as the reception of Christianity did not render men impeccable,) to afford those who had fallen after baptism—which could not be more than once administered—another means, by which, through the efficacy of his blood, they might be restored to the forfeited favour of God.

That the power was confined to those present when Christ said to the disciples, "receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven," will on reflection be admitted incorrect. St. Thomas was not present, yet, did he not possess the power conferred on the other disciples? St. Paul had not been even converted:—was he not an Apostle? did he not receive the same gifts? was he not endued with the same powers?

Faculties conferred for a certain purpose, are generally withdrawn when the purpose has been accomplished. The establishment of Christianity rendered the miraculous powers conferred on the first believers no longer necessary. But sin has not ceased. At the very birth of Christianity, when the faithful were edified by the instructions, and animated by the holy example of the Apostles,—when to be a Christian and to be a saint was almost synonymous,—if criminals, for whose reconciliation to God, Christ deemed it necessary to concede to the ministers of his Church the power of absolving from sin, were to be found in the very assemblies of the holy: was it not of more imperative necessity, when these sacred lights were withdrawn,—when faith had become weakened—hope was failing—and charity had cooled,—when crime had increased, and criminals in the Church become infinitely more numerous? Would God concede these faculties, when they were comparatively little required, and withhold them, when the sphere of their exercise became enlarged, and their continuance became of paramount and deplorable necessity? When the other Apostles were removed, and St. John, for a considerable period, was the sole survivor, were all sinners, through the extended Church, obliged to have recourse to one individual;—and when he died, did the ministry of reconciliation cease? Ah! no. Christ has more bountifully provided for our necessities: the power of administering this, as the other sacraments, was included in the commission of the Apostles, and continues to be transmitted to the Priests of the Church of God.

"It seemed impossible that sin could be forgiven through penance. Christ hath made this grant to his Apostles, which is transmitted by the Apostles to the priestly office."—(St. Ambrose, book on Penance, ch. ii, no. 12.) In the right to administer baptism, and to preach the gospel, Christ conferred on the Apostles, and, through them, on their successors, the power of exercising all duties connected with their sacred ministry, till time should be no more. "All power is given to me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you, and behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world."—St. Mat. xxviii. 18, &c.

Worldlings and unbelievers may sneer; but you, beloved Christians, will not hesitate in proclaiming your faith in that article of the Apostle's creed, which teacheth "the forgiveness of sins." As, at the words of the angel, the chains fell from St. Peter's feet,—at the absolution of the minister in the sacrament of reconciliation, the soul is loosed from sin. Who that believeth in the words of Jesus can doubt a truth so clearly revealed? "Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven," are the words of the Redeemer himself. To question his words, would be to doubt his divinity. To those who persist in disbelieving, it will be necessary to prove Jesus to be God.

There are only two paths conducting to heaven,—one of innocence—the other of penitence. Those who have sullied, by mortal guilt, the baptismal robe—emblematic of stainless purity—must tread in the rugged way of penance. "If," (as it is beautifully expressed by the holy council of Trent,) "in all who have been regenerated, there continued that gratitude towards God, by which they would have constantly guarded the justice they had received in baptism,—the institution of another sacrament for the pardon of sins would not have been necessary." But, alas! there never did,—nor does there,—nor, from the weakness incidental to our nature, is it expected there will, in the generality of mankind, ever exist, gratitude towards God, sufficiently effectual to preserve the baptismal robe as they first received it, spotless and unblemished. Were there, to those fallen after baptism, no other means of forgiveness, who could feel

assured of salvation? The Catholic Church declares that you are not thus hopeless,—that of all his infinite attributes, God delights in the exercise of mercy most; "His mercy is above all his works." It was in reference to this attribute, that the Almighty sublimely contrasted his ways and thoughts with the conduct and feelings of men. "As the heavens are exalted above the earth, so are my ways above thy ways, and my thoughts above thy thoughts, saith the Lord." The sacrament of penance is the effect of his gratuitous mercy. If, after regeneration, we grievously violate the holy laws of God,—as the soul once purified in baptism, is forbidden all future access to its healing waters; were there no other means of salvation, and we in consequence damned,—however we might lament the inexorable rigour of our punishment, resulting, as it would, from our actual transgression,—conscience would wring from us, in the depths of hell, with the ineffaceable mark of baptism burning on our brow, an acknowledgment of the justice of the sentence.

Thanks! praise! adoration! eternal gratitude to you, oh, my Jesus! who willest "not the death of a sinner," but his conversion; who hast more mercifully provided for human weakness—who hast left in thy church the holy sacrament of penance, this sovereign remedy for an afflicted conscience; in which, through the infinite merits of thy sacred passion and death, every sinner, who sincerely desires to be converted from his iniquities, will be purified from crime. Never! never did our affectionate Redeemer display more fully his boundless benevolence, than in the institution of this sacrament of mercy. However frequently we may have transgressed, we have not exceeded the measure of his goodness. "How often," asked Peter, "shall my brother offend me, and shall I forgive him?—Is it seven times? Not seven times, (replied Jesus,) but seventy times seven times." In this sacrament there is pardon for every sinner and for every sin. "*Whose* sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven." "*Whatsoever* you shall loose upon earth, shall be loosed also in heaven.

Happy! oh! how happy, those pure and virtuous souls who need not penance; who, tossed upon the waves of human passion, have securely guarded from peril the sacred bark of baptismal innocence. Truth, confirmed, alas! by fatal experience, constrains us, for the most part, at least, to confine those blessed innocents within the very limited circle of youthful piety. Would

that I were enabled, efficiently, to impress on all, and principally those parents to whose guardianship they are entrusted, the awfully serious responsibility they have contracted before the living God—to protect these souls from ruin. Would I were enabled, efficiently, to impress on them, that if, by neglecting to remove the obstacles impeding their salvation, these children shall die, they must be answerable for their blood; in other words, that, in their fall, they will drag their parents with them into the horrors of hell. "Moreover, if the just man shall turn away from his justice, and shall commit iniquity, I will lay a stumbling-block before him: he shall die in his sins, but I will require his blood at thy hand."—Ezech. xviii.

If such be the unhappy consequence resulting from neglect of admonition; how much more grievous the crime, and more fearfully terrible the retribution awaiting the wretch whose actual scandals have accelerated, perhaps caused, their fall. "But he that shall scandalize one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh." (Mat. xviii. 6, 7.) Guard, then, beloved Christians, earnestly, attentively guard,—protect, with a parent's truest fondest affection,—the tender and defenceless shoot of youthful piety, which it should be your most pleasing, as it is your highest and most important duty, rightly to train up, and properly to cultivate. Inculcate, with all the religious seriousness, with all the pious zeal, with all the animated energy of which you are capable, on their young and tender minds—that they should never, even for an instant, listen to the suggestions of the tempter;—that if, seduced by that dangerous curiosity which leads to the knowledge of evil, so fatal to our first parents, and so fatal in its consequences to us, they be induced to partake of the unhallowed fruit of sin, however pleasing to the eye or gratifying to the palate it may be pourtrayed or felt—they will be ejected from—never,—never to return again to, the pathways of innocence; as the flaming sword of the Seraph at the gate of Paradise prevented our expelled parents all future access to the blissful abode of purity and peace. But whilst endeavouring to impress on parents the interesting and important duties, which, as such, they owe to God and to their little ones, I am, as regards the

parents of these six hundred poor children, forcibly reminded that in many instances this appeal will not, cannot be responded to. A great number of them are deprived of a father's kindness and protection; the warm pulse of the mother that loved them, cold in death, throbs no longer with affection for them. To secure them from the dangers fatal to innocence, they have no refuge,—but in the paternal providence of that supremely great and good Being, who does not cease to watch over the destitute and fatherless—in the pious instructions of their zealous and exemplary clergymen,—and in the religious and moral education provided for them by your charity and compassion. Unimportant as these little ones may be regarded by worldlings, before the Sovereign Judge they are of much consideration; nor will he suffer them to be despised. "See that you despise not one of these little ones: for I say to you their angels in Heaven always see the face of my Father, who is in Heaven." (Mat. xviii. 10.) God is most pleased with the youthful offerings of innocence and virtue. He directed the first-born to be consecrated his priests. (Exod. xiii. 2.) The offerings of the tender first-fruits were most agreeable in his sight, and with the young of the flock he was most delighted in sacrifice.

I generally dislike public processions: they frequently display too much of unchristian hate, too much of political or religious rancour; and appear to be, at best, idle and unmeaning mummery. But, when I was last in Liverpool, a procession took place which could not fail to move the most obdurate heart; on which it was impossible to look with dislike or disregard. You will recollect, beloved Christians, the Sunday on which many of these children who surround your altar received their first communion; when, after the sacred act, in which they consecrated themselves, in an especial manner, to the love and service of Jesus, they walked, preceded by their clergymen, in solemn procession, through your town. As this train of holy innocents passed by, arrayed in garments of white, symbolic of the virgin purity of their hearts; many a confirmed sinner, hackneyed in vice, and hardened into crime, must have felt himself reproved, as his recollection was thus forced back to the days of his childhood, when his bosom, like theirs, was guileless and pure.

There is to the worldling a species of melancholy pleasure in looking back through the troubled waters of his own life,—

darkened by many a crime—agitated and sullied, by the violence and foulness of many contending and overwhelming passions,—to the period when his hands were clean, and his heart was pure,—ere the animating glow of youthful feeling had been chilled by the world's heartlessness,—ere its delicacy had been blunted by sordid avarice or detected impositions of deceitful hypocrisy;—ere his brow had been prematurely furrowed by wretchedness and care;—ere his unhappy soul had been stained with guilt, and wounded and bruised by the keen stings of remorse, and the corroding poignancy of desponding and too frequently unavailing sorrow.

To witness these virtuous children entering into the temple, and, kneeling before the altar of their God, raising their pure and innocent eyes to Heaven, clasping their spotless hands in prayer, and pouring forth the grateful effusions of religious and unadulterated hearts, in the glowing fervour of youthful and unaffected piety:—this was indeed a spectacle with which angels must have been pleased, and which the whole court of Heaven must have delighted to contemplate. The odour of that prayer, more agreeable to the Creator than the most delicious perfumes of Araby, pierced the skies, and, as the grateful incense was presented by the angel having the golden censer, who offers up the prayers of the saints on the golden altar before the throne of God (Rev. viii. 3), the Eternal, pleased with its fragrance, regarded the holy offering with complacency, and, in token of its acceptance, the benediction of the Almighty Father, the graces of the Holy Spirit, the love and wisdom of Jesus, accompanied by the kind wishes of the heavenly court, descended on the heads and into the hearts of the youthful votaries, informing their minds, and purifying and ennobling their spirits. Ah! who would exchange this blissful state, for the cold and expensive wisdom which the experience of this world's iniquity, disingenuity, and selfishness, impresses on the heart!

Christians! it is to preserve these innocents,—who, happily, need not penance from the corruptions of sin, by providing them the means of moral and religious education, that it is now my duty to address you.

You, rich and gay; you, sons and daughters of affluence and comfort; unused to, and happily raised above the necessity of, daily labouring for your daily bread,—whose heads, incessantly

perplexed with expensive schemes of pride and pleasure, are hourly languishing for some novel and untried enjoyment: to whom wealth appears but given to gratify each strange caprice, each modern revolution of vanity;—who, indolently lolling in the lap of luxury and ease, like Rasselas in the happy valley, have no wants but such as refined delicacy supplies to those who want for nothing; to whom there are no wishes ungratified, no delights untasted, no appetite which has not been palled even to wearisome satiety,—come, and I will relieve you from the listless and distressing ennui which depresses your mind and sours your temper:—come, and I will teach you a new and untiring luxury, the luxury of charity, of a good, humane, and generous action.

There cannot be a nobler object for the exercise of Christian charity than the preservation of these six hundred poor children from the vices of the world. The voices of imprecation, obsenity, and drunken blasphemy, which so frequently shock the ear as one passes through your streets and alleys, the gaols and scaffolds of your country, the voices of your numerous convicts in a distant land, attributing their crimes to irreligion and ignorance, loudly proclaim the necessity of providing for the children of the poor a good moral and religious education.

It remains with you to say, shall these six hundred poor children, many of them destitute orphans, rescued by the zeal of your clergymen, hitherto supplied, through your kind and compassionate charity, with the means of useful knowledge, and the higher advantages of religious instruction, be now, through unfeeling neglect, abandoned to wretchedness and ruin, the inevitable and deplorable consequences of ignorance and crime? Oh! let me answer for you, in the name of charity—religion—God—that they shall not be thus abandoned. How delightful will it not be to witness men of different political and religious sentiments, forgetting all their differences, emulating each other in deeds of charity, evincing the purest patriotism, the most sacred love of country, in ameliorating the condition of, and protecting from immorality and vice, the rising generation, ensuring for themselves the divine blessing which Christ has promised only to the merciful. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." (Matt. v. 7.)

My poorer brethren, if I have principally addressed the rich, it was not from disrespect to you, but from conviction that an appeal to your feelings of charity was uncalled for—unnecessary. Humanity and benevolence, now, as in the days of the Redeemer, are principally to be found among the humble and the poor. When the forlorn and houseless outcast would be repelled, by the pampered menial, from the portals of nobility;—when he must not presume to enter the avenues leading to the magnificent villa,—when he dare not even touch the rapper or the bell by which the rich are admitted into the houses of the wealthy,—he turns with confidence to your lowly habitations, who are scarcely raised by one remove above himself; with you he is secure of an asylum,—under your roof he is certain of shelter; and, if famishing, he knows he will be admitted to the hospitality of your humble board, the participation of your frugal and scanty meal. Why then address myself to you? I am acquainted with, and I respect your feelings. You have no hesitation in contributing,—your only regret is, that your means will not enable you to assist this valuable institution to the extent of your wishes. But be not disheartened. He, who, because she gave "out of her want," preferred the widow's mite to the most magnificent donations "cast into the treasury;"—He, who regards not the amount of the contribution, so much as the charitable and feeling heart which impels you to contribute, will not permit your humanity to pass unrewarded. At the moment your humble donation is presented, as formerly to the disciples, in the instance of the widow's mite, He may announce to his Eternal Father, to the Holy Spirit, to his blessed mother, to the angels, archangels, cherubim, and seraphim, you have "given more than all." Pardon me, then, my humble friends, if, pleading the cause of the poor and the orphan, I turn from you, and, appealing to the rich, who are frequently unfeeling, I conjure them to draw liberally on their purses, and assist, according to their means, this most valuable institution.

Penury is as clearly,—nay, often more clearly conspicuous, in the niggardliness of the offering, than in an open, unblushing, and heartless refusal. Oh! let not cold and unfeeling avarice, like the torpedo's touch, chill all the kindly and ge-

nerous emotions of your nature. Remember, you are but the stewards of your wealth: you cannot create it. "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of Hosts." (Hag. ii. 9.) It belongs, then, to God, in whose name I ask it; you have only the use, and what is superfluous he has bequeathed to the poor. And yet, so bountiful is he, if you willingly share it with the poor, he will reward you a hundred fold. "He that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord." The Lord himself will become your debtor, and can you doubt, when pledged, the boundless generosity of the Almighty?

Contribute towards this Charity; and, in the act, that you may receive an eternal recompense, be guided by the noblest, the purest, the holiest motives. Do it for the sake of humanity; do it for the sake of religion; do it for the sake of God; do it in the manner most pleasing to God, and recollect that will be by contributing according to your means; and if those means be ample, by making a rich, generous, splendid offering of that wealth, of which you are but the stewards of the Lord, and with which he has, for these very purposes of charity, entrusted you. When pride, pomp, vanity, pleasure, party, find in you munificent donors, do not, oh! for the sake of your blessed Redeemer, do not let this appeal in behalf of these pure and spotless innocents, these little ones of Jesus, find you alone deficient in generous liberality. "According to thy ability be merciful: if thou have much, give abundantly; if thou have little, take care even so, to bestow willingly a little; for thus thou storest up to thyself a good reward for the day of necessity." (Tobeas iv. 8.)

Come forward, beloved Christians, cheerfully, with your contributions; and, on the bed of death, in the day of necessity, when the most skilful physicians cannot, even until the rising of another sun, prolong your life,—when the wealth and power of the world can no longer serve you,—may the prayers of these poor children obtain for you peace, and comfort, and joy, from *Him*, who has thus promised:—"And whosoever shall give to drink, to one of these little ones, a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple: amen, amen I say to you, he shall not lose his reward." St. Mat. x. 42.

I have now done. My dear children, I must confide your

case to your own prayers. Prostrate yourselves, then, before the altar of your God; and whilst the choir chaunts towards Heaven the praises of the Lord, petition your affectionate Redeemer that He may pour down his Divine blessings, forgiveness, and mercy, on your Pastors,— the reverend gentleman who has preached this morning on your behalf — as also on me,—and on all those who will this day become your benefactors.

—May the peace and blessing of the Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, descend upon you, and dwell in your hearts for ever. Amen.

THE END.

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